

# Scottdale woman's sister founded Pittsburgh NOW

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Virginia Scott Poiser of Scottdale is proud of her sister, Wilma.

She believes the circumstances of her sister's youth may have been the start of a crusade for women's rights that would take Wilma Scott Heide around the world and to a place in history as the founder and first president of the Pittsburgh National Organization for Women chapter, the third established chapter in the country.

Poiser, the oldest of four children, says Wilma was the third in the family, born between two bright, athletic brothers - Ray Scott, who became a sports announcer known as the "voice of the Green Bay Packers," and Harold Scott, the "voice of the Minneapolis Vikings."

"Born between two brothers, I think that made her competitive. She was a tomboy," says Poiser.

Heide is the subject of a book, "A Feminist Legacy: the Ethics of Wilma Scott Heide," by Eleanor Humes Haney, also the author of "Feminism for the Health of It," both published in 1985 by Margaret Daughters Inc.

Heide was born in 1921, and lived in Ferndale, Pa., until 1932, when the Scott family moved to Connellsville. Heide was a 1938 honors graduate of Connellsville High School.

She became a registered nurse and worked at the Pennsylvania College for Women, now Chatham College, from 1948 to 1950.

It was the military career of her husband, Eugene Heide, that would first take her from Pennsylvania. When she lived in Georgia, she became active in the NAACP and marched with Dr. Martin Luther King.

She returned to live in the Pittsburgh area, was a lecturer at a number of colleges and later earned her Ph.D. in sociology.

In 1967, Wilma organized and became president of the Pittsburgh Area NOW chapter. The following year, she became active in the national NOW organization, and in 1970, was elected to chair the national NOW board.

Heide was instrumental in the formation of several other organizations, including the Nurses Coalition for Action and Politics (N-CAP), the National Women's Political Caucus, and a publishing company related to NOW, KNOW Inc.

Heide's daughter, Terri Mena of Boston, says she believes her mother's greatest accomplishment, however, is that she always used her position to bring other women along into leadership roles.

Heide presented her views worldwide. She spoke at the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico City, sponsored by the United Nations, in 1975.

Poiser says she was on a tour to Norway and Sweden in the late '70s, and by chance, Heide was a guest of the Swedish government at the same time. She says they stayed in the same hotel and had dinner together, an unusual and unplanned family get-together.

Poiser says Heide was invited to speak in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1985, but declined due to health problems. She says her sister died a short time afterward from a heart attack.

Mena says that her mother's sudden death was difficult for many, since so much of Heide's work was left unfinished, but her life affected countless women.

She says, for example, the probate attorney who handled her mother's estate did not charge a fee. The lawyer explained that she didn't believe she would be where she was if not for the work of Heide and others.

Mena, who works for American Public Television in Boston, and her sister, Tamara Heide, who is a disc jockey in Los Angeles, both attribute their success to a combination of a mother who believed in them and the groundwork she and other very courageous women laid before they were even old enough to think about having careers.

Tamara Heide says, "She instilled in both of us a pretty fierce sense of independence and personal responsibility."

She says one contribution she and Mena made was sharing their mother, who can be considered a mother figure to the feminist movement.

She describes Heide as "a visionary" and "ahead of her time."

She says her mother believed she got a call at a young age to be a minister, but at that time, women in the ministry were unheard of.

"Her feminism and her passion for human rights was her mission and her call," she says. "She did become a minister after all."